



May 5-6, 2012

Genesis 39

"Understanding Temptation"

Pastor Gary Hamrick

Our study this week is the first of two messages on the subject of temptation. This teaching about Joseph's "up-close-and-personal" encounter with temptation follows the account of Joseph's brothers' selling him into slavery. The Providence of God is working behind the scenes, because he ends up living in the household of one of the most influential people, in the most powerful nation on earth; an official of Pharaoh's named Potiphar. This is anything but a coincidence; it's a God-incidence! It's the plan of God working, because unbeknownst to Joseph, God has strategically placed him in a position that will eventually ¹ open the door for him to become the second most powerful man in Egypt, next to Pharaoh himself. And it will be in this position of power and authority that Joseph will save his immediate family and preserve the Jewish nation.

This particular story has all of the necessary ingredients for a tawdry affair: a handsome, well built young man, and an older woman who is rich and powerful. Joseph is about 21 years old ² when Potiphar's wife is physically attracted to him. She is extremely aggressive and she came right out and said to Joseph, "*Come to bed with me!*" ³ There's no sweet-talking or time-wasting at all; it's just "Come and have sex with me!" Joseph, however, is a man of integrity, character, godliness, and it's his desire to please God more than gratify his flesh, so the Bible tells us "*he refused.*" ⁴

We need to be careful to overlook his integrity and the courage it took to walk away from this situation, and we shouldn't be fooled into thinking that this would have

¹ It's important to note that *eventually* is the right word to use, because Joseph would spend 12 years in prison for a crime he didn't commit, prior to being placed in a position of tremendous power and authority.

² Joseph was 17 years old when he arrived in Egypt as a slave, so about 3-4 years have passed.

³ [Genesis 39:7](#)

⁴ [Genesis 39:8](#)

been easy because “Mrs. Potiphar” wasn’t beautiful or he didn’t find her to be attractive. We can be sure she was beautiful for two reasons. The first is that “ugly” doesn’t tempt! The second reason is that every rich and powerful man, like Potiphar, always has a beautiful woman on his arm.⁵ The reality is that this is really a true story about someone who honored God in a very tempting situation!

Temptation Is Common To All

1. Temptation unavoidable and is to be expected.
2. Temptation is all around us and we can’t escape it, especially as different forms of media have made the sensual and the sexual readily available on TV (prime time or not) and computers, in magazines, and everywhere else you can think of!
3. **1 Corinthians 10:13** - *“No temptation has seized you except what is common to man. And God is faithful; he will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear. But when you are tempted, he will also provide a way out so that you can stand up under it.”*
4. Everyone will be subject to various temptations, including the...
 - a. Temptation to lie
 - b. Temptation to steal
 - c. Temptation to deceive
 - d. Temptation to manipulate
 - e. Temptation to seduce or be seduced
 - f. Temptation to covet
 - g. Temptation to whatever!

Temptation Is Internal And External

5. Internal temptation comes from our sinful, human nature.
 - a. We can’t blame the devil for everything, because the fact is that our flesh made us sin; sin is what people do.
 - b. Even after we come to faith in Christ for salvation, there will still be the struggle in our spirit concerning doing what is right and wrong.
 - c. **Galatians 5:16-17** - *“So I say, live by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the sinful nature. For the sinful nature desires what is*

⁵ Esther’s story is one biblical example of a powerful man (King Xerxes) having a beautiful woman “on his arm.” (**Esther 2:7-9**)

contrary to the Spirit, and the Spirit what is contrary to the sinful nature. They are in conflict with each other, so that you do not do what you want.”

6. External temptation comes from the world and Satan.
 - a. There are, literally, external demonic and worldly forces that will assault us from time to time, so we shouldn't put it past the devil to parade someone or some thing in front of us.
 - b. We must learn to spot the traps and the snares of the enemy, because Satan is a master at entrapment, and he will use every opportunity to lure us into sin.
 - c. Satan knows our weak and vulnerable spots, so he will try to capitalize on them.
 - d. **1 Peter 5:8-9** - *“Be self-controlled and alert. Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour. Resist him, standing firm in the faith, because you know that your brothers throughout the world are undergoing the same kind of sufferings.”*

Temptation Is Not A Sin By Itself

7. Temptation can lead to sin, but it is not sin in and of itself.
8. **Hebrews 4:15** - *“For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are - yet was without sin.”*
9. If Jesus can be tempted, and yet was without sin, that tells us that giving in to temptation is sin, not the temptation itself.
10. Martin Luther said, “I can't prevent the birds from flying overhead, but I can prevent them from building a nest in my hair.”
11. Temptation can be progressive, leading to sin.
12. **James 1:14-15** - *“... but each one is tempted when, by his own evil desire, he is dragged away and enticed. Then, after desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full-grown, gives birth to death.”*

Temptation Is A Relentless Battle

13. Temptation is kind of like “Whac-a-mole,” ⁶ in that no sooner do you pop one in the head, another one pops up somewhere else!
14. It is a true statement that we will deal with temptation the until the Lord returns or takes us home, and it won't be any easier just because we're older and have walked longer with the Lord. ⁷

Discussion Questions

1. Review the introduction to the study guide with your group to provide the appropriate background.
2. Read [Genesis 39](#) to provide an overview for this study.
3. Allow the people in your group to share their experiences when temptation was as “in your face” as the temptation Joseph encountered.
4. Spend time discussing whether or not you agree with Pastor Gary's comment that “ugly doesn't tempt.”
5. It's true that temptation is unavoidable, because it's everywhere, so how can Christians avoid “caving in” to sin?
 - a. Share examples of specific ways you've eliminated temptation.
6. Spend time talking about this quote from Martin Luther: “I can't prevent the birds from flying overhead, but I can prevent them from building a nest in my hair.”
7. Read and discuss [James 1:14-15](#).



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⁷ We would do well to remember that it was Solomon's pagan wives that led him astray, so it wasn't any easier for him to deal with temptation just because he was older.

- a. What are some of the “fishing lures” you’ve gone after that have caused great harm and pain in your life?
8. Read and discuss [1 Corinthians 10:13](#).
 - a. How has the Lord brought about escape routes in your life?
 9. Read and discuss [Galatians 5:16-17](#).
 10. Read and discuss [1 Peter 5:8-9](#).
 - a. What types of prey do lions go after?
 - b. Spend time talking about times of victory when you were able to stand firm, by the power of the Holy Spirit, to resist the devil.
 11. Close your time in prayer by asking the Holy Spirit to help each person: understand temptation and realize that being tempted is not sin, but sin is giving in to temptation; be on the lookout for the snares, traps and schemes of the enemy (have someone ready to read [1 Peter 5:8-9](#) to pray the Scripture); remember that temptation to sin is common to everyone, and that each person has the power of the Spirit to resist temptation for the glory of God!

* Unless noted, all Scriptures quoted are from the New International Version (NIV 1984).